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Health Disparities Experienced by American Indians and Alaska Natives

American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) are a heterogeneous population with approximately 560 federally recognized tribes residing in the rural and urban areas of 35 states. In 2000, a total of 2.5 million persons (0.9% of the U.S. population) classified themselves as "AI/AN alone" and 4.1 million (1.5%) as "AI/AN alone or in combination with another race." During 1990-2000, the AI/AN population increased 26%, compared with 13% for the total U.S. population. Of all racial/ethnic populations, AI/ANs have the highest poverty rates (26%)---a rate that is twice the national rate. Coincident with these socioeconomic burdens are persistent, and often increasing, health disparities.

This issue of *MMWR* describes disparities in health for certain preventable health conditions (i.e., diabetes, cancer, bronchiolitis, and injuries) among AI/ANs. The rates of injuries, diabetes, and bronchiolitis were two to three times as high among AI/ANs than among all racial/ethnic populations combined. Cancer death rates among AI/ANs were lower than the overall U.S. rate, with large regional variations. Public health efforts are ongoing to address these disparities. These efforts reflect the importance of partnerships among tribal, state, and federal public health organizations. The high vaccination coverage among Alaska Native children reported in this issue demonstrates that effective public health interventions can make a difference. Similar successes are needed in other program areas. *MMWR* will continue to highlight health disparities among this and other racial/ethnic minority populations in the United States.

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